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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0234
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C O N F I D E N T I A L GABORONE 000486

SIPDIS

FOR AF/S AND NEA/IR

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [IR](#) [BC](#)

SUBJECT: BOTSWANA AND IRAN: FOOTBALL AND DIPLOMACY

REF: GABORONE 336

Classified By: Pol/Econ Chief Heather Merritt for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) On June 9, the Botswana Football Association (BFA), the governing body for soccer in Botswana, announced plans for a match between the Iranian national soccer team and Botswana's national team the Zebras to be held July 5 in Gaborone. Botswana, like the rest of the Southern Africa, is trying to capitalize on the 2009 Confederations Cup and 2010 World Cup to attract new tourists and also to increase international exposure for its soccer team. According to the Embassy's LES Political Assistant (who is also the BFA Vice President), Botswana's President Ian Khama reacted angrily to the announcement of the Iran-Botswana match, and phoned Minister of Youth, Sport, and Culture Gladys Kokorwe to ask why this match had been organized. Minister Kokorwe explained that the BFA and not her Ministry was responsible, and so the President summoned BFA representatives to a meeting at the Presidency on June 12.

¶2. (C) President Khama was accompanied by Foreign Minister Skelemani at the June 12 meeting with BFA President David Fani and other officials from BFA and the Sports Ministry. President Khama reportedly asked the BFA why they had organized a football match with a country like Iran. Khama complained that Iran was undemocratic and treated women badly. He said that Iran had been trying to open diplomatic relations with Botswana, but that he would not allow Iran to open an Embassy here in Botswana. David Fani of the BFA explained that a sports agent based in Cape Town had come to the BFA and offered this friendly match to the Zebras. The Iranian team is planning a series of matches in Southern Africa, including one against South African professional team Kaiser Chiefs. According to the BFA, Botswana was not asked to pay any expenses for the visiting Iranian team and the sports agent would take 15% of the gate as a commission. The BFA told Khama that Iran is a FIFA member (soccer's worldwide governing body) and that they did not consider politics when accepting the match. President Khama grudgingly agreed that the match could continue, and the BFA promised to check more carefully with the Government before accepting any other potentially controversial matches for the national team. President Khama, who is also the official "patron" of the national soccer team, also agreed that he would attend the match (as is his custom), but told the BFA that they had to ensure that he and his delegation were seated as far away as possible from any Iranian officials attending the match. He said that he preferred not to speak to any Iranian representatives during the game.

13. (C) COMMENT: Botswana's principled stance on Zimbabwe, North Korea (reftel), and even Iran seems to originate from the genuine moral beliefs of President Khama and other government leaders. President Khama clearly has no sympathy for "rogue" states, and under his leadership the Government of Botswana should be willing to play a helpful role in international bodies on votes dealing with these nations. It is interesting to learn that Iran has approached the GOB seeking to open diplomatic relations. Iran has an Embassy in Pretoria, but according to the Botswana diplomatic list, there is no accredited Iranian representative here. Many Ambassadors resident in Pretoria also cover Botswana, but given Khama's dislike of Iran, it is not likely that Iran will accredit an Ambassador to Botswana anytime soon. Though Foreign Minister Skelemani frequently says publicly and privately that "Botswana is a friend to all" and the country is a member of the Non-Aligned Movement, the GOB is likely to continue on the path of friendly relations with the USA and UK and cold relations with rogue states. END COMMENT.
NOLAN